**Structured Small Group Program**

**Topic: Safely Expressing Emotions**

**Needs**

Existing Data Source 1:  A record from the school nurse indicating the prevalence (and specific names and severity of injury, if possible) of students within the school who have been seen by the school nurse for known or suspected self harming behavior.

Existing Data Source 2:  Psychological report from the school psychologist.

Additional Data Source:  Self Harm Needs Assessment Questionnaire (created by group leader). See Appendix B.

The record from the school nurse will provide valuable information regarding the prevalence that self harming behavior is occurring among the schools’ student population.  This can help the group leader identify how significant of a concern self harm is among students and help to determine how quickly this issue needs to be addressed.  The report from the school nurse may also provide information regarding the severity of the self injuries of those students who are being seen in the school nurses office.  Depending on the records and the school policy, the school nurse may also have a list of specific students who are self injuring or suspected of self injuring themselves.  Psychological reports are another valuable tool to help identify student needs and gaps in achievement.  Psychological reports will likely provide a plethora of information on a specific student ranging from the student’s family/home environment, behavioral concerns (absences from schools, discipline issues at school), academic history, psychologists observations of the student in a variety of settings, possible results from assessments such as cognitive abilities, intellectual, behavior, self-concept, anxiety, memory, reading comprehension, written and oral expression, math calculations and math reasoning (Wilmshurst & Brue, n.d.).  By analyzing the psychological reports it can help the group leader determine whether or not a particular student may be a good member for participating in a group focused on safer ways to express emotions instead of using self harming behavior. In addition, the psychological report may shed light on possible reasons for the student engaging in self harming behavior and to what degree the self harming behavior may be affecting the student’s grades, particularly in core subjects such as math and language arts.  The Self Harm Questionnaire will be analyzed to gain a better understanding from the schools’ student population regarding whether or not they are engaging in self harming behavior and if so how they believe this behavior is affecting them personally and academically.  The questionnaire is a tool that allows the students to informally (and likely more comfortably than having a direct conversation) voice their beliefs and feelings regarding their self harming behavior.

Data-driven, needs-based assessments used in the school setting are essential in helping to determine the actual (not perceived) needs of the student population.  These types of assessments are based on real data and are useful in locating gaps in academic achievement.  Analyzing this data helps professional school counselors identify the areas in which students need the most assistance (socially, emotionally, and academically) in order to achieve the schools mission.  As a result of the analysis of data-driven needs based assessments and identifying focus areas for students helps school counselors to accomplish their own professional organizations vision set by the American School Counselor Association which is to "prepare today's students to become tomorrow's adults" (n.d., p. 1).

**Goal**

8th grade females who have a recent history of engaging in mild, non-suicidal self injurious behavior will increase their knowledge of and utilization of safer strategies to express emotions in their everyday lives which in turn will increase their academic achievement in the classroom.

**Objectives**

Session 1 Objective - School Counseling Content:  Identify triggers and emotions associated with their self harming behavior.

Session 1 Objective - Mathematics Content:  Develop an understanding of solving multistep linear equations with one variable on both sides of the equation.

Session 2 Objective - School Counseling Content:  Identify and explore techniques to safely express emotions.

Session 2 Objective - Language Arts Content:  Enhance the ability to read and analyze a variety of fictional texts, narrative nonfiction, and poetry.

**Population**

This group is for 8th grade (approximately 12-13 years of age) female students who have a recent history (last 12 months) of engaging in self harming behavior. This group will consist of all female students to help encourage “security, acceptance and shared experience” among the group members given the sensitive nature of the topic (Erford, 2010, p. 44).

**Needs Analysis**

Simpson and Bore indicate that self harming behavior is quickly becoming a realistic trend among adolescents (2008). A study conducted by Ross and Heath “indicated that 13.9% of 440 adolescents sampled participated in self-injurious behavior” (2002, as cited in Simpson and Bore, para. 1). Based the research data as well as an analysis of the needs assessment, it was determined that a significant number of students within the school were engaging in or had engaged in self harming behavior. It was determined there was a critical need to implement intervention strategies to help these students find safer alternatives to their self harming behavior. The goal is to increase their knowledge of and utilization of safer strategies to express emotions in their everyday lives which in turn will increase their academic achievement in the classroom.

**Theoretical Orientation**

For a number of reasons, school counselors do not engage in intensive, long term therapy sessions with students. Due to the intense nature and underlying concerns with individuals who engage in self harming behavior, these cases are usually referred out in to community mental health counselors to work through the deep issues. School counselors do however help to facilitate improvement in other ways. Warm, Murray and Fox indicate that school counselors can help self harming students to identify and utilized alternative healthier ways to express their emotions (2002, as cited in Simpson & Bore, 2008). Taking into account the limited amount of time for counseling in the school setting as well as the fact that cases of self harm are usually referred out, the group leader will use a solution focused brief therapy approach because it will allow the group leader to concentrate on solutions rather than the cause (de Shazer, 1985 as cited in Winship, 2007).

**Recruitment and Screening**

Given the sensitive and personal nature regarding the topic of self harm, recruiting for this group needs to be considered carefully. Lieberman (2004) advises that counselors limit providing details on self harming behavior in order to help decrease adolescents from imitating the behavior. Given this information, recruitment will *not* be widely publicized through the school through flyers, posters or school announcements. Instead recruiting group members will be conducted by having personal conversations with the school nurse, 8th grade teachers of core academic subjects and administrators for referrals. Once referrals are received, the group leader will conduct personal interviews with the group candidates to determine the severity of the student’s self harming behavior, if the student is involved in a community counseling, if the student is interested in identifying safer ways to express emotions and if they have any significant underlying issues that may impede the group process.

**Structure**

The Safely Expressing Emotions group is a psycho-educational group that will meet in the counseling department’s group room for a total of six closed sessions. Per the recommendation by Erford (2010), this group will consist of approximately 6-10 adolescent members in order to allow for the most productive group environment. Each session will be approximately 30 minutes in length and in an effort to minimize time away from the same class, this group will rotate its meeting time. This group will be offered twice per year.

**Core ASCA Standard(s)**

Personal/Social Development

PS.A1.5  Identify and express feeling

PS.A2.6  Use effective communication skills

PS.B1.3  Identify alternative solutions to a problem

PS.C1.7  Apply effective problem-solving and decision-making skills to make safe and healthy choices

PS.C1.10  Learn techniques for managing stress and conflict

PS.C1.11  Learn coping skills for managing life events

**Core State of Virginia Academic Standard(s)**

Mathematics (Grade 8) - 8.15 a) The student will solve multistep linear equations in one variable with the variable on one and two sides of the equation

Language Arts (Grade 8)  - 8.5 The student will read and analyze a variety of fictional texts, narrative nonfiction, and poetry.

**Program Evaluation**

The effectiveness of this group program will be evaluated by using a pre-test at the beginning of the session one and a post test at the end of the final session. The sample of the pre and post test is located in Appendix D. Pre and post test questions are the same and should be answered with a yes or no answer. The test scores will be tallied. Additionally, a statistical t test will be used to determine whether or not group members increased their knowledge of identifying triggers and safer methods of expressing emotions as well as their accuracy in solving equations with one variable on both sides of the equation and analyzing grade appropriate poetry.

**Ethical. Legal, and Multicultural Issues**

Group leaders need to clearly understand that in working with minors, it is the parents/guardians who have the legal right to their child's private information (Erford, 2010).  However, from an ethical perspective group counselors have a responsibility to protect the privacy and confidentiality of the minor client (Erford, 2010).  Sometimes providing general information as to the progress of the overall group or the child is enough to satisfy the curiosity of parents/guardians.  Group leaders are allowed to provide parents/guardians with information related only to their child, not about any other group member (Erford, 2010).  Group leaders must clearly inform parents/guardians and students of limits to confidentiality.  Parents/guardians and students must be advised that group leaders are legally required to breach confidentiality if there is an imminent risk of the students harm to him/her-self, harm to others or if abuse is suspected.  This is particularly important to the issue of working with minor students who self harm.  For the purpose of this group, it is assumed that parents/guardians are already aware of their child's tendency to self-harm, especially given the fact that they must sign the informed consent for their child to participate in the group.  However for example, if the child's self harming behavior intensifies in frequency or severity, the group leader will need to notify the child's parents/guardians and refer to appropriate professionals to get help for the child.  One of the best ways to prevent problems with disclosing confidential information is make sure all parties involved are adequately informed about the limits of confidentiality before any work takes place.

Please see the Informed Consent in Appendix B.

Schools around the United States are becoming more and more diverse with students from a wide range of cultural backgrounds.  As a result, it is very important for group leaders in schools to be knowledgeable and skilled in this area so they can effectively work with a diverse population.  The group leader needs to make a significant effort to attentively listen to and understand each student from his/her own background without passing judgment.  It is important for group leaders to help each member gain a personal awareness of how his/her cultural background plays a role in their life.  Additionally, the group leader will encourage all group members to respect the diversity of others and try to understand how cultural backgrounds affect the perceptions, beliefs, feelings and actions of others.

With groups being smaller versions of the general population, it is not uncommon for issues of conflict, bias, prejudice, oppression and discrimination to be displayed and mentioned during group work.  One method is for group leaders to not sweep these issues under the rug but rather to embrace them and encourage discussion about these concerns within the group environment.  Groups that have established respectful, safe and trusting relationships among its member will likely be more comfortable talking through sensitive topics such as these.  Openly discussing these concerns will allow a voice to the person feeling injustice, it allows for open dialogue hopefully establishing new insights for all members and the potential to empower group members to fight societal injustice.

There are several personal characteristics that group leaders can utilize to promote positive, caring and safe group environments.  Erford (2010) states that some of the most helpful characteristics for counselors who are leading groups is to have it the ability to adapt to different situations, members and different needs of members; a genuine belief in the benefits of group work, enthusiasm to help, self confidence in their knowledge, skills and abilities; and the ability to model desired positive behavior.  The leader sets the stage for the group members.  If the leader is not positive, caring or interested in the group it is highly unlikely that the group members will display these characteristics.  Helping members learn appropriate interpersonal skills (listening, being empathic to others, respecting others), skillfully drawing out members to enhance their group participation and tactfully stopping hostile exchanges in communication are also all helpful strategies to help create a positive, caring and safe atmosphere (Erford, 2010).

Professional school counselors are obligated to perform their job in accordance with the ethical standards of their professional organization.  The American Counseling Association (ACA, 2005 as cited in Erford, 2010) specifically states that group counselors must properly select group members whose personal needs match the goals and objectives of the group.  In addition, the ACA guidelines state that counselors are to protect their members from harm during the group process (2005, Erford, 2010).  Protecting members from harm include actions such as making sure the group environment is safe, advising of confidentiality and its limits, encouraging genuine and productive interactions among members.  The ACA Code of Ethics also indicates that group leaders are expected to only work within the competence of their knowledge, skills and abilities (ACA, 2011).  Ethically group leaders have a responsibility to the minor group members to address confidentiality (and limitations) during the screening process, the beginning of the first session and as appropriate throughout the group process and in preparation for after termination of the group.  Legally, group leaders must also properly advise minor member’s parents/guardians of confidentiality and the limitations of confidentiality and get the parents/guardians consent for their child to participate in the group.  In addition, legally group leaders are to be well versed in state and federal law pertaining to their profession.

**Session 1**

**Title:** Safely Expressing Emotions – What’s Your Trigger

**Brief Summary of Session:** To help members identify triggers and emotions of their self harming behavior.

**Theoretical Orientation:** Solution Focused Brief Therapy

**Specific Group Technique:** Not focusing on the underlying reasons for the self harm but instead identifying triggers that lead to their urge to self harm. In addition indentifying emotions felt immediately before and immediately after engaging in self harm. Group leader will use appropriate questing to help members contemplate the reasons why they self harm and the feelings associated with their self harming behavior.

**Duration:** 30Minutes

**Materials/ Media:** Note cards (two per group member), pen/pencil

**Core ASCA Standard(s):**

Personal/Social Development

PS.A1.5  Identify and express feeling

PS.A2.6  Use effective communication skills

**Core Virginia State Academic Standard(s):**

Mathematics (Grade 8) - 8.15 a) The student will solve multistep linear equations in one variable with the variable on one and two sides of the equation

**Objectives:**

Session 1 Objective - School Counseling Content:  Identify triggers and emotions associated with their self harming behavior.

Session 1 Objective - Mathematics Content:  Develop an understanding of solving multistep linear equations with one variable on both sides of the equation.

**Assessments**: Observation was used to asses each objective.

**Procedures/ Instructional Strategy:**

* Remind of confidentiality and its limits
* Recap last session (initial session – consisted of in depth discussion of confidentiality and its limits, group member introductions, discussed group guidelines, introduced topic)
* Begin discussing what a “trigger”
* Using a note card have the member write on one side “Before” ask them to identify their emotions immediately before they self harm. On the other side of the note card, have the member write “After” and identify their emotion they feel immediately after they self harm.
* Encourage members to share and discussion their note cards
* Using the miracle question technique, guide members through what they believe would be different if they did not self harm. Advise members they do not have to share today but to continue to reflect on the miracle question during the week.
* Discuss homework – see below
* Take a few minutes to practice as a group accurately solving equations with one variable on both sides of the equation
* Briefly explain the objective of next week’s session

**Homework/ Ownwork**: To reflect on how their life would be different if they could find alternative ways of expressing their emotions. This homework will be a prelude to next session.

**Group Stage and Emerging Issues:** A concern is for the group leader to try to manage the content and direction of the group discussion so that the emotions disclosed do not go to too deep of a level. To keep the disclosure at an appropriate level given it is a school setting and not a community counseling setting.

**Session 2**

**Title:** Safely Expressing Emotions – Small Steps Lead to Big Change

**Duration:** 30 Minutes

**Brief Summary of Session:** To help members see that by taking small steps can lead to significant change in their lives. This session will focus specifically on brainstorming and identifying possible safer alternatives to their self harming behavior that can be utilized in their everyday lives.

**Theoretical Orientation:** Solution Focused Brief Therapy

**Specific Group Technique:** Not focusing on the underlying reasons for the self harm, not focusing on the act of self harm but instead drawing attention to possible realistic and positive solutions that can be utilized in member’s everyday lives. Group members will brainstorm together to identify possible solutions instead of being directed by group leader. Group leader will use effective questioning to better understand the issue and solutions from the group members as well as scaling to help gauge effectiveness of the group content. Group leader will assign homework at the end of session to give members a chance to practice their new method and discuss in the next session its effectiveness or lack of effectiveness.

**Materials/ Media:** WordsPoem by Tate Simi (See Appendix C), Whiteboard and Crayons/Colored Pencils

**Core ASCA Standard(s):**

Personal/Social Development

PS.A1.5  Identify and express feeling

PS.A2.6  Use effective communication skills

PS.B1.3  Identify alternative solutions to a problem

PS.C1.7  Apply effective problem-solving and decision-making skills to make safe and healthy choices

PS.C1.10  Learn techniques for managing stress and conflict

PS.C1.11  Learn coping skills for managing life events

**Core State Academic Standard(s):** Language Arts (Grade 8)  - 8.5 The student will read and analyze a variety of fictional texts, narrative nonfiction, and poetry.

**Objectives:**

Session 2 Objective - School Counseling Content:  Identify and explore techniques to safely express emotions.

Session 2 Objective - Language Arts Content:  Enhance the ability to read and analyze a variety of fictional texts, narrative nonfiction, and poetry.

**Assessments**: Observation was used to asses each objective.

**Procedures/ Instructional Strategy:**

* Remind of confidentiality and its limits
* Recap last session (triggers that were identified and feelings associated with self harming behavior)
* Introduce the concept of small steps lead to big changes
* Scale question – How confident are you in knowing and using alternative safer methods of expressing your emotions?
* Read and discuss poem
* Initiate group discussion of safe ways to express emotions and write suggestions on the board
* Have group members draw a large circle on a piece of paper, tell them “this is your stepping stone”. Write down at least one safe method of expressing your emotions that you would like to try and tell me why.
* Go around and let members share
* Scale question – NOW, how confident are you in knowing and using alternative safer methods of expressing your emotions?
* Discuss homework – see below
* Briefly explain the objective of next week’s session

**Homework/ Ownwork**: Advise members if they feel the urge to engage in self harming behavior, they stop and utilize one of the safer alternatives that was identified during group session and report back next session to discuss the outcome.

**Group Stage and Emerging Issues:** Some group members may not be motivated yet to try to want to change their self harming behavior. Group members may have the desire to change but strong emotional situations could occur in their personal life to make it challenging for them to try alternate safer methods of expressing their emotions.

**Appendix A - Self Harm Questionnaire**

Directions: Please circle the most appropriate answer as it relates to you.

1. Have you ever harmed yourself on purpose?

Yes

No

1. Do you currently harm yourself on purpose?

Yes

No

If you answered yes to question number 2, please continue with the remainder of the questionnaire.

If you answered no to question number 2, you do not need to continue the questionnaire.

1. How often do you typically self harm?

Once per day Several times per day

Once per week Several times per week

Once per month Several times per month

Once per year Several times per year

1. Which method(s) of self harm do you use most frequently? Circle all that apply.

Cutting Burning

Hitting/Punching Picking/interfering with the healing of wounds

Scratching Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Who is aware that you self harm?

No one

Parents/Guardians

Other Family Members (sibling, aunt/uncle, cousin)

Close Friends

Almost Everyone

1. Why do you believe you purposely harm yourself?

To stop my bad feelings

To avoid having to do something

To get attention

To feel something, even if its pain

To punish myself

To help myself relax

I have no idea why I harm myself

1. How do you most commonly feel just **before** you begin to injure yourself?

Mad

Sad

Peaceful

Powerful

Scared

Joyful

Other (please describe): ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How do you most commonly feel during your self-harming acts? Circle all that apply.

I feel a lot of pain

I feel a little pain

I do not feel any pain

Mad

Sad

Peaceful

Powerful

Scared

Joyful

Other (please describe): ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. How do you most commonly feel just **after** you injure yourself?

Mad

Sad

Peaceful

Powerful

Scared

Joyful

Other (please describe): ­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­­\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

1. Other than self harm, what other ways do you currently manage your emotions and stress?

Writing in my journal/diary

Talking with an adult

Talking with a friend

Participating in sport(s)

Taking a walk

Listening to music

Other (please describe): \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_

I don’t use any other way to manage my feelings and stress

1. Are you interested in learning safer ways to express your emotions?

Yes

No

Maybe

1. Are you interested in stopping your self-harming behavior?

Yes

No

Maybe later

1. Since you began self harming, have your grades in math declined?

Yes, by one letter grade

Yes, by two of more letter grades

No, my grades are the same as they were before I started self harming

1. Since you began self harming, have your grades in language arts declined?

Yes, by one letter grade

Yes, by two of more letter grades

No, my grades are the same as they were before I started self harming

Appendix B – Informed Consent

May 30, 2012

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Our comprehensive school counseling program allows students the opportunity to participate in small group counseling experiences that are relevant to their needs throughout the school year.

This is an invitation for your child, \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_, to participate in a small group which will focus on Safely Expressing Emotions. This group meets once per week beginning on October 1st, 2012 for a total of 6 sessions. Each session will last for approximately 30 minutes. In an effort to minimize time away from the same class, our group will rotate its meeting time.

This group is designed to help students who have a mild history (non-crisis stage) of self injurious behavior to identify triggers and emotions associated with their self harming behavior. This group will explore techniques to safely express emotions.

**Confidentiality will be respected and addressed during each session however please be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.**

Participation in this group is voluntary. If you consent (or do not consent) to your child’s participation in this group please complete the form below and return the lower portion to the Guidance Office no later than September 15, 2012.

Please contact me if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Christy M. Freeman, Professional School Counselor

954.647.6095 (Office) or [cfreeman@liberty.edu](mailto:cfreeman@liberty.edu) (Email Address)

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**Consent for Participation in Safely Expressing Emotions Group**

\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*\_\_*\_\_\_\_\_

Student Name

**□** I give my consent for my son or daughter to participate in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Group.

**□** I do not give my consent for my son or daughter to participate in the \_\_\_\_\_\_\_ Group.

*\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_ \_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_\_*

*Parent/Guardian (Printed Name) Parent/Guardian (Signature)*

**Appendix C – Words Poem**

**WORDS**

Where would we be now

Without words

To communicate our thoughts

And build bridges across

Our misunderstandings

I have seen

Many wordless faces

Suffocating

In their own silences

I have tried

To decipher

Your wordless dreams

And to interpret

The unspeakable you had

No words for but yours

Is an impossible

Wordless world

Words consoled me

In my saddest hour

Kept me company

In my worse moment

Of loneliness

I believe in words

Say Something!

~ Tate Simi

**Appendix D - Pre/Post Test**

|  |
| --- |
| **Name of Group Member:** |
| **Assessment of Group Objectives** | Yes | No |
| 1. I know what usually triggers my self-harming behavior. |  |  |
| 2. I can accurately solve equations with one variable on both sides of the equation. |  |  |
| 3. I know more than two ways to safely express my emotions other than using self-harm. |  |  |
| 4. I can accurately read and analyze poetry in my language arts class. |  |  |
|  |  |  |
| Score |  |  |

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